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UNCLAS PRETORIA 000581

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S M. TABLER-STONE, B. NEULING

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL ZI SF

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA DENIES ZIMBABWE POWER, FUEL CUTS
POLITICALLY MOTIVATED

REF: PRETORIA 546 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) The South African power utility Eskom reduced its supply of electricity to Zimbabwe during January, according to February 6-8 South African press reports. Eskom spokesman Fani Zulu said that the power utility provided less power than required to Zimbabwe because of planned "maintenance outages" at generation plants. Zulu claimed that the maintenance work was normal this time of year, and that it simply took longer than expected to bring the plants back on line. South Africa has resumed providing the requested amount of power to Zimbabwe, Zulu said.

¶2. (U) The Eskom press story followed a similar report in the February 5 The Sunday Independent, claiming that the South African Department of Minerals and Energy sent a circular to South African fuel companies urging them to cease supplies fuel to Zimbabwe. The circular supposedly cited "refining issues" as the reason for the cut-off. Department spokesperson Yvonne Mfolo denied that the Department sent any circular, as did the South African Petroleum Industry Association.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The press reports about cuts in South Africa's supply of fuel and electricity to Zimbabwe have sparked speculation in South Africa that the SAG is sending a subtle political message to the Government of Zimbabwe to reform or risk the consequences. While South Africa is increasingly concerned about the economic decline in Zimbabwe and frustrated by the failure of their loan and constitutional initiatives to bring change (reftel), we have no evidence that the electricity cuts were politically motivated. End Comment.

TEITELBAUM